

# The Relation of the One-Act Play to the Short Story

by Lita Battey

*1913*

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of the University of Kansas  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## THE RELATION OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY TO THE SHORT STORY.

Most of the literary forms of modern English have been amply fathered and it is not a little interesting to trace the ancestry of a new division. There are almost as many "fathers" of modern prose as there are literary historians to point them out and support their claims, for no sooner has one author decided that the present form of word or sentence structure begins here ~~of~~ here than another hastens to upset his carefully worked out theory and prove beyond a doubt that all that has been suggested so far hangs upon the work of a previous writer never before properly appreciated.

However, it has been fairly well decided now that the American short story began with Poe and Hawthorne, altho' we do not hesitate to give Irving honorable mention. The ancestry of this interesting form of prose fiction extends back thru a long line of stories, from Dickens, thru Addison, Malory, Chaucer and Boccaccio, to the Gesta Romanorum. Professor Brander Matthews traces it to the Greeks in Herodotus and even to the Egyptians. But many of the traits of the early tales have been lost and Kipling little resembles Boccaccio.

The one-act play is neither so well established to-day as the short story nor so easy to trace back to its beginning. The first plays in England, however, complete in one act and

without change of scene were some of the old miracle plays. They belong to the thirteenth century and were performed at about the time that the drama left the church and was taken up by the town guilds.

"The Crucifixion," one of the Wakefield miracle plays, has much the same material as Charles Rann Kennedy's "The Terrible Meek." The treatment is bold of course, for it permits of the driving the nails, putting Christ on the Cross, and finally sending a spear thru the body to see if He is dead; it lacks the finish and effect of the later play entirely. Still one is decidedly suggestive of the other, for Mary of the earlier one grieves and talks in much the same way as Kennedy's peasant woman. The earlier one considers the process of crucifixion, itself, while the modern one uses the darkness of the night following with the voices explaining conditions; so the time element differs a little. The Cornish "Mystery of the Crucifixion" adds a character, the Centurion, to the Wakefield play. This character realizes the divinity of Christ and grieves to see what he has done; he almost exactly corresponds to Kennedy's Captain. A successful playwright today could hardly be unfamiliar with the material of the drama that has preceded him; probably, Kennedy has consciously imitated these old plays. But whether he did or not, this common subject matter forms a definite link between the very early and the modern one-act plays.

"The Mystery of the Three Maries," altho quite short, has a dignified simplicity that is unusual even in modern authors. It portrays the morning of the Resurrection with Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James, and Mary Salome at the tomb of Christ. Jesus comes in at the close as the gardener to make himself known, and promise to return after ascending into Heaven. "The Mystery of Mary Magdalene and the Apostles" goes a little further than the "Three Maries," and while it is a totally different play, seems as tho' it might be a continuation of the latter. Mary Magdalene tells the apostles that Christ is risen and they do not believe her till he appears to satisfy them, and to leave for the seat "at the right side of God, the Father." Most of the miracle plays are in one act, but many of them require a decided change of scene, easily represented on a sceneless stage. I have not considered them. The spirit of these plays is decidedly religious; the dramatic coloring is real and sincere. "Everyman" the greatest of the morality plays is in one act. Many of its characters and teachings have been revised and revived in Browne's "Everywoman," a modern morality play in three acts. *The Interlude deserves mention as an early form of the modern vaudeville sketch or curtain-raiser. The purpose and spirit seems much the same.*

After the moralities, the plays begin to lengthen to five acts following the classic model. The incidents are rather loosely strung together but assume a plot by Shake-

sphere's time,--possibly a little earlier than that in dramatists such as Marlowe or Lodge. Between this time and the nineteenth century, there are practically no one-act plays, unless we except some of Ben Jonson's masques, in England. In France, however, Molière wrote plays complete in one act as early as 1660 "L'Ecolle des Femmes", "Facheux," and "Jalonsie du Barboville" all appeared at about this time. They were highly farcical and borrowed much from the Italian comedy of mask in spirit, while not a little of the material was taken from the old Italian tales that Boccaccio had used for his stories. Moliere also wrote plays in three acts.<sup>1</sup> It has been recently urged that Moliere did not influence English drama vitally. If he did in the matter of shortening it, it was only after a good many years.

Plays in England were written in five acts until the comedy of manners in the second half of the eighteenth century. Sheridan's "Duenna" and "The Critic" are in three acts and his "Scheming Lieutenant" is in two. A little later, Byron's "Manfred" and "Cain" are published in three acts.

In 1822 Shelley's lyrical drama, "Hellas" was written in one act. It is, of course, more poem than drama for it is filled with beautiful lines that do not advance the plot. Still, it is quite typical of the closet-dramas that are

1. D. H. Miles: The Influence of Moliere on Restoration Comedy. N. Y., 1910.

written by Tennyson and Browning. The Greek charuses, too, are used by Matthew Arnold and Swinburne.

In 1847 "Box and Cox" by Morton was played at The Theatre in London. It is little more than a farce and its only interest lies in the clever turns of wit. It grows tiresome before the close, and reminds one of the eighteenth century drama because of its lack of vital action. From this time on, an occasional one-act play was written,<sup>1</sup> S. T. Smith wrote slight ones about 1865. In 1886 Jerome K. Jerome produced "Sunset" and in 1888 "Barbara." "Sunset," built on Tennyson's "The Two Sisters" is melodrama, yet it is not entirely objectionable, for it has a good deal that is life-like about it. "Barbara" has more plot, as well as more humanity in it. Mistaken identity is the general theme,--the heroine discovers her relatives after years of separation.

By 1890 Strindberg had written <sup>2</sup>eleven one-act plays. They were not very successful, however, because he made them so long that they lacked conciseness and tired the audience. They corresponded to three-act plays in the time required to produce them, and a song or dance separated them into three divisions. "Miss Julia" was his most popular production; his doctrines were those of Nietzsche. He cut the number of actors down to two or three; this of course, is quite char-

1. None of these are in the U. of K. library.
2. Not in U. of K. library.

acteristic of many of the one-act plays of the last few years,

Up to 1900 the one-act plays have been like the large drops before a shower, for since that date, many more have been written and produced and the present outlook for the new form is promising.

Very generally, the history of fiction and that of the drama with regard to length have been much alike. Both began from brief forms and gradually assumed larger proportions. Some of the dramas of the early seventeenth century, Henry IV, for instance, required two plays of five acts each to complete the material. The early novels were monotonously long; Clarissa Harlowe, published in 1748 was in eight volumes. But the novel became shorter and shorter almost immediately. The drama, carried to its height in Shakespeare's time, remained the same throughout the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth centuries. It was considered the highest form of literature and influenced the early ambition of many literary men. The essayist Steele and the novelist Smollett began by writing dramas, and the sturdy old Samuel Johnson came to London with "Irene" under his arm. But the novel appealed to a larger audience and probably because of that has surpassed the popularity of the drama ever since. Still,<sup>1</sup> "for years the novel was conceived almost in the manner of a play with its characters talking and acting, projected for-

ward and detached from their surroundings as tho' they were appearing upon an isolated platform scant of scenery and bare of furniture. The personages of prose fiction were not related to their environment nor were they shown as component parts of the multitude that peopled the world.<sup>6</sup> It was after Scott's marvellous success that novel writing was considered a paying proposition and writers set themselves to the association of nature and human nature. In the years that followed it became more life-like and at the present time shares with the longer drama, that of three or four acts, the detailed explanation of the truths of life.

The short story, a development of the nineteenth century is quite in keeping with the spirit of American "hurry-up" life, and since fiction and the drama have always been associated, in fact are almost parallel in development, it doesn't seem too far-fetched to assume that the one-act play has been coaxed into that happy form by the popularity and possibilities of the short story.

<sup>1</sup> At the present time, as Mr. Clayton Hamilton points out, the one-act play can be given professional production in three ways: as vaudeville; as a curtain raiser; as serious drama with three or four plays making up an evening's performance.

1. The One-act Play in America. Bookman, Apr.13, 1913.



The vaudeville play, planned to amuse its audience has been popular for some time and still is, <sup>owing</sup> due largely to the fact that "the vaudeville managers seem to have made up their minds that their audiences have no brains" while the people who attend the cheaper houses are obliged to accept what is provided. It reminds one of "Sneer's Comment in Sheridan's "Critic": "The theatre in proper hands might be made the school of morality; but now, I am sorry to say it, people seem to go there especially for their entertainment." Still, there is a tendency to produce something here and there that has a little thought mixed with much laughter, as in Barrie's "The Twelve Pound Look," played by Ethel Barrymore, or Shaw's "How He Lied to Her Husband." The development of the vaudeville sketch has come about in the last fifteen years. At first, the story was a mere skeleton for the specialties of the vaudeville stage, but as time went on, more story interest was required to amuse the audience, with less tumbling and juggling, until real thought and a serious purpose, as we find in the short story, has entered into these productions in a small way.

The curtain-raiser of the "Box and Cox" sort is much more popular in England than in America for the late dinner hour there makes it necessary for the managers to provide entertainment for the common people until nine o'clock when the aristocrats arrive and want to see all the "show." Mr.



George Middleton in "The One-act Play Neglected",  
 an article which was published in at <sup>I</sup> last year's New  
 York Dramatic Mirror, urges that there is unusual opportu-  
 nity for the sale of these "little waifs of the stage" to Eng-  
 lish managers for curtain-raisers, and makes a plea that  
 more be written.

But the third division of the one-act play, the serious  
 drama, is at present the most promising of the three. Mr.  
 Middleton, who is himself the author of twelve admirable  
 plays insists that there are many concentrated situations in  
 life that will not admit of lengthening. "Thus many of the  
 nooks and crannies of human nature and snapshots of the hid-  
 den acreage of life which grows untold social problems,  
 might be thrust with one sharp impression upon an audience."

It is just this sharpness that gives the play its  
 strength, the "totality of impression" that Poe claimed for  
 the short story. It shocks one into an awakening, an under-  
 standing of conditions, possibly, whereas a longer play  
 might divide the interest and necessarily the effect. A  
 sharp needle reaches deeper than a dull one. If the object  
 of a modern drama be that it instruct, the one-act play ought  
 to be the greatest instrument for good in the literary or  
 dramatic field. Mr. Middleton in the preface to "Tradition  
 and other One-act Plays" says again: "In spite of the dif-

<sup>I</sup> Jan. 13, 1912

II. Lit. Digest. "Plea for the One-Act Play" Feb. 24, '12

ficulties of the one-act play, with its obligatory swiftness of exposition and economy of means, - - - it presents peculiar advantages in dealing tersely with the sharp contrasts of character and with the conflicts in social points of view which after all cause most of the vital drama of life."

However, <sup>I</sup> Professor Pitkin observes that "the one-act play is the next of kin to the schort story for it differs from the latter less in its ideals and purposes than in its medium of expression. - - - Kipling, Howells, and Anthony Hope show us how close the one-act play is to the short ~~story~~ story. The 'Dolly Dialogues' often leave you in doubt as to whether you are reading drama or story- - - and many curtain-raisers might be put straight over into prose and sold to magazines. All of which shows that the only decisive difference between the species is in the form of presentation."

A marked resemblance between the two forms under consideration is in the expression of local color. Each author whether playwright or short story writer portrays those people and tells of that life that he knows best. We would recognize the Irish background of Synge or Lady Gregory, or the New England of Percy Mackaye's "Yankee Fantasies" quite as readily as we would Mary Wilkins Freeman's dear, disappointed old ladies who keep a copy of Mrs. Hemans on the parlor table, the faithful negro of Page's Virginia, or the wicked humanity of Bret Harte's early California.

It is not hard to find two authors using the same material. Myra Kelly's stories of the people of the Jewish quarter in New York City have delighted everyone. Through the lives of the children that she describes we get hints of the home life, as in "A Christmas Present for a Lady." But stronger, more forceful than these is the one-act play "Little Italy" by H. B. Fry .

The situation is the Italian quarter of the east side of New York. Giulia is home-sick . In talking to Fabio Rinaldi, the husband, she asserts that she likes "Better even the dirt of Napoli than the clean of New York." She is not only home-sick but heartsick. She loves her step-child, Gioja, but merely endures her husband, for she was forced to leave Michele, her Neapolitan street-singer lover. During the evening meal, she is the common-place, unhappy, dissatisfied woman till suddenly an Italian song comes up from the courtyard. It answers Giulia's homesickness first, and then the heartsickness, for she realizes that the singer is Michele. She argues with her husband and finally persuades him to let her take lessons of the singer. Arrangements are made. While Fabio goes back to the bakery to work, Giulia dresses in her best and hurries in to Michele. The lovers are happy again in being reunited, and plan to leave. Giulia picks up a few of her belongings, and just as they are about

to leave, Fabio is heard coming. Hurriedly, the wife sends Michele on down the stairs, while she steps into the dumb-waiter with her bundle, saying confidently that it "carry two hundred pounds coal easy." The audience hears the scream and the sudden crash of the waiter far below. Fabio enters, common yet kindly and hears his daughter read the note that has been left. Jealousy rises along with anger in his heart and he prepares to leave to avenge his wrong. He doesn't hear the confusion in the hall till Michele enters carrying Giulia and she dies as the men face each other. They fight and it is only when Michele reminds him of the punishment of the murderer and "Who will take care little Gioja then? Who? Who?" that Fabio staggers to a seat and grieves, while the child comes in crying for her mother. The tension is felt everywhere in the play and the climax, different from the usual melodramatic revenge touches the audience and holds its sympathy after the drop of the curtain. The series of Italian stories now running in the Outlook, by Adriana Spadoni, including "The Lesson" and "A Great Man" give the reader a real understanding of the anticipation and longing that the ill-paid and under-fed Italian holds for America, to him the land of promise.

Another story in the Outlook for June 28, '13, "When

1. June 28 '13; July 26, '13,
2. by Ruth Sawyer.

"Padraic Came Piping" has the very breath of Ireland for atmosphere. The half-witted Padriac, the piper, has all the genius and inner knowledge of things that the ancient piper had for all he seemed so queer. The climax is influenced as one would surmise by the piping--for the judge who is about to sentence a man to the gallows for murdering an English landlord is so moved by the music that he confesses his own guilt. Ireland has done more for the one-act play than any other nation. Already, three very popular playwrights have produced successful plays in the Irish Theatre at Dublin. The material of these plays is much the same and yet different. All the characters are poor, but then the Irish are poor--and there is a certain mystery that seems to hang over things, a poetic mystery somehow, that must belong to Ireland, for I find it everywhere.

Lady Gregory has seven one-act plays. Of course there is dialect, but not so broad as to be unintelligible. In "Spreading the News" a supposed murder forms the nucleus of the plot. Everything points to one Bartley Fallow as the criminal even to his coming in with the hayfork with which the crime was said to have been committed. The handcuffs are put on and he is all but convicted when the murdered man walks in unhurt. The teaching is plain enough--many a man is unjustly punished thru mere circumstance.

The plot of "Hyacinth Halvey" is comparatively loose but each of the series of incidents leads to the next in a direct line to the climax. Hyacinth is tired of being good and tries as hard as he can to ruin his reputation. In each escapade some one else is caught and bears the blame. When he finally robs the church and happens to give a certain coin with others to a friend, it is recognized as the half crown—the nest-egg that had been handed around in the collection plate Sunday mornings for a year. The friend is taken off to jail while Halvey tries in vain to explain that he is the real offender; at the close, he is hailed as a martyr, because he tried to suffer for his friend, and three cheers are given for him. Therefore, when we find someone who is good, we are to know that some poor fellow is suffering for his real shortcomings. The sarcasm is really delightful in places.

The background of "The Rising of the Moon" is suggested in the name. A sergeant is on duty on the shore waiting for a man, ringleader in the organization of the people's cause, who has broken jail; a price is on his head. The sergeant stops a ragged man that appears and talks rather roughly to him. The newcomer is self-confident, however; he tells the sergeant that he knows for whom he is waiting and oh! the man is a villain! He'll just wait with him; and the sergeant is glad to have him do so. He sings ballads that really

give signals to friends below on the water. At last the officer suspects him and yet is in reality in sympathy with the people's cause that the man sought represents. The ragged man thinks he understands him and says:

Man: "Maybe, sergeant, it comes into your head sometimes in spite of your belt and your tunic that it might have been as well for you to have followed Granuaile."

Sergeant: It's no business of yours what I think.

Man: Maybe, sergeant, you'll be on the side of the country yet.

Sergeant: (gets off barrel) "Don't talk to me like that. I have my duties and I know them.

A boat is heard below and immediately the man sings-- "One more word for signal taken- - -at the Rising of the Moon." A whistle from below repeats the air and the sergeant understands that the ballad singer is the man he is watching for,--in fact he acknowledges that he is, but the other policemen are heard returning and the man is forced to hide behind a barrel, saying as he does. "You won't betray me - - - the friend of Granuaile!" The sergeant doesn't. He is true to the people and when the man leaves unharmed he says, meditatively, "I wonder, now, if I am as great a fool as I think I am?"

"The Travelling Man" is the best of the seven plays of



Lady Gegory:--except for names mentioned it need not belong to Ireland alone for its teaching is universal. A poor woman has had divine aid when she most needed it, from a stranger who is King of the World. He promises to return sometime. When he does, she is so worldly that she doesn't recognize him till he has gone. Much of the material of the play is given thru the child. The mother tells the story of her early unhappiness, until the King brought her to the door of this home where she married the lonely widower and has been happy. Even this night the woman is making "a grand cake with white flour" hoping that the King will come. She goes away a little while and in her absence He comes and plays with the child. Upon her return she sees that His feet are muddy and that He is "a common traveling man off the roads." She drives Him away, but the child follows only to return with the information that the Stranger has gone across the flood with a light at his feet. He has left a branch with apples and flowers on it "not of any earthly tree." Then the mother knows. Lady Gregory calls it a "miracle play" and it reminds one of the very early plays of the thirteenth century; however, as in "The Terrible Meek" the deep religious suggestion and significance give a certain poetic effect that is lacking in the early ones.

"The Jackdaw" is merely a tangle of amusing incidents.



Mrs. Broderick is about to lose her shop because of a ten pound debt and be taken to the workhouse. She has written to her brother for aid but had no reply. She appeals to Nestor, a kindly old fellow, for advice and goes to the bank to try to borrow the money, leaving Nestor to mind the shop. While she is away, the brother arrives with the ten pounds. He wants to help his sister but fears that she will expect aid from him ever after. Nestor suggests that they just let her find it. It is left so, but while Nestor is putting it in the almanac, Mrs. Broderick returns, and he rams the notes into his pocket. He finally buys her jackdaw, assuring her that a wealthy man from South Africa wants it, and she hastens to court to pay her debt. In a few moments, people, the brother also, come in to buy snares, nets, rakes and whistles to catch jackdaws and the fun begins. The court breaks up and the officers come to the shop to invite the wealthy stranger to dinner, whereupon everybody leaves except Mrs. Broderick and Nestor who <sup>hides and</sup> offers somebody five shillings if he will draw "Tidbits" over his feet. This little play shows the true Irish wit, and yet gives an example of the unhappiness of the Irish poor.

"The Workhouse Ward" presents two old rheumatic men who had been neighbors. They always have quarreled and even now almost curse each other. When the sister of one comes in and

offers to take him home with her, the two old fellows grieve at parting. Finally the fortunate one decides that he will not go unless his friend come along. The sister, irritated, leaves and the man sinks back in his bed to argue that probably her house wasn't as large as she said. When the other agrees and goes even so far as to say that her periwinkles are "a hungry sort of food," he promptly bids him to stop his impudence and it is only a moment till they are happily quarreling again.

"The Gaol Gate," the last of the seven plays again has the religious teaching of the old miracle play. Two old women, a mother and grandmother, come to a jail at night to see their boy who has been held for firing a shot that he did not fire. The women have heard that he told who really did it and now hope to see him free. The gate-keeper appears and they give him the letter they are not able to read. He explains that it would have admitted them before but now the boy is dead--hanged for his deed--no evidence had been brought in for him at all. Grief comes first to the poor old mothers and then the realization that he hadn't told on his friend, but had died instead. They jubilantly go away to "shout it through the roads, Denis Cabel died for his neighbor." And both the women are called Mary!

Lady Gregory's <sup>1</sup>"Seven Short Plays" is dedicated to W. B.

Yeats who has done more for the Irish Theatre, probably, than any other person. Mr. Yeats has three one-act plays which were produced about 1902. "The Hour Glass" deals with a philosopher who has discovered things greater than religion. In an argument with Teigne, the Fool, we learn of his assurance. Teigne always brings luck. As he leaves, he says an angel is behind him. The angel appears to the wise man to tell him that he has just one hour to live, and unless he finds one person who believes in God within that time, he will be given over to eternal damnation. The appearance of the vision upsets the philosopher's theories, and with one eye on the hour-glass he sets about trying to find someone who believes. His pupils treat his question as a capital joke and a desire to argue. Even his wife and children laugh at him. It is the Fool, of course, who returns and brings luck to the wise man, for he like the Piper, the half-wit of the story, has inner understanding.

"Cathleen ni Hoolihan" is largely symbolic. She is Ireland herself who is an old woman under the oppression of the English. Many a man, she sings, has died for love of her in the past and many will die in the future. She grieves over the loss of her beautiful green fields. As the curtain rises she hobbles up to a cottage where preparations are being made for the son's marriage on the following day. Michael, himself is strangely moved by her weird singing; the mother in

speaking to the father, observed that "he has the look of a man that has got the touch." The parents cannot interest him in his approaching marriage. When the neighbors rush in, his bride among them, to bring news of the French ships landing at Killala, he hurries out after the old woman who goes down the path "a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen." Hope brings youth and the love of country is greater than love of home. Mr. Yeats' own short story <sup>1</sup>"Red Harnahan's Vision" is quite as fanciful as this little play, which proves <sup>2</sup>Professor Pitkins theory that "the only decisive difference between the species is in the form of presentation."

"A Pot of Broth", Yeats' third one-act play, is merely a display of Irish wit. A tramp stops at a house where he hopes to get food. The woman is selfish, but he engages her curiosity when he produces a stone-which he picked up to throw at a dog-that has marvelous qualities: Just put it in a pot of water and behold! it makes the finest broth in the world. They try it. The beggar throws in this and that-- just for flavor-- even cooking a chicken in it awhile, till a truly good broth is produced. When he cannot sell her the magic stone, he gives it to her. There is nothing uplifting about the little play; it simply amuses.

J.M. Synge is about as moody, yet tender a man as Keats or Chatterton. He loved Ireland passionately, and has man-

aged to rouse his audience to one emotion always--pity. It is pity for the poor and the lonely people along the shore and on dreary moors. Two one-act plays by Synge have been successful wherever they have been produced.

"Riders to the Sea" belongs to the Island of Inismaan. A mother is grieving over the death of Michael, her son; her husband and four sons have been drowned previously. Her two daughters put the clothing, which they have discovered belongs to Michael, by the stitches dropped here and there in the stocking, in the loft. The play uses the death of the sixth son as its plot. The mother had just gone out after him to bless him but couldn't speak. The overreaching power of destiny is almost crushing, and specific lines almost haunt one, such as: "And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?"

"The Shadow of the Glen" is equally tense if it lacks some of the brooding sorrow of "Riders to the Sea." Again the curtain rises on a kitchen, with a dead man, covered with a sheet, at one side. Nora the young wife steps softly about. Suddenly a knock is heard and a tramp enters. The two talk of the dead man, Dan Burke, and finally of a young <sup>Michael,</sup> man who herds sheep and lives near. Nora goes out in the rain to find him. While she is gone, the sheet is drawn

down and the man beneath it sits up. He has been testing his wife, and finds her bad. When voices are heard outside he settles back again. Just at the point when the shepherd sees Nora's little pile of money, and is putting his arm about her, Dan sneezes and jumps to the floor. He orders his wife away, and the tramp suggests that she come with him and share the joys of the road. She goes and Dan and Michael sit down in peace to drink. P.P. Howe in criticism of the play says: "There is no one-act play in the language for comprehension, for humanity, and for perfection of form to put near "In the Shadow of the Glen." Synge undoubtedly presents a life-size picture of Ireland, just as he saw it, with all of its poverty, and unhappiness. There is no denying the "totality of impression" here.

The serious one-act play has not been popular in England, consequently, few of the English dramatists give their time to them. Pinero wrote one, but it was entirely unsuccessful. In "How He Lied to Her Husband", Bernard Shaw has really more comedy than tragedy, more real sport than thought. Still it deals with a real condition in English life, while "The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet" is supposedly American. It is situated in a courthouse in "a territory of the United States of America." The characters are scoundrels and proud of it, unless we except the mother who comes in to save Blanco from being lynched. She confesses that she took the



horse he was supposed to have stolen, and tried to take her child who was dying with croup to the doctor. Blanco is ashamed to be thought good; he marries the wicked woman who tried to have him lynched. The only thing that suggests a teaching is the fact that both Blanco and Feemy are not so far gone in evil but that they can be moved by goodness. The whole play is overdone. It is almost disgusting. Even the good woman says: "I was a good wife to the child's father. I don't think any woman wants to be a good wife twice in her life." The word "rotten" occurs not less than five times on each page. It ought to characterize the play. No wonder the Lord Chamberlain keeps it off the English stage! No wonder it failed in America! Strange that it succeeded in Ireland; yet it probably did because of the wit and cynicism, dear to the Irish soul, foul or sweet.

Where did Shaw find his material here if not from reading the short stories of Bret Harte with their western gamblers and low people, or those of Stewart Edward White with the Arizona cowboys? We Americans very naturally consider Shaw's people poor imitations.

"The Twelve Pound Look" by Barrie suggests a different spirit in the author than that child-like love of life which characterizes his other books and dramas. A business man has been materially successful, and has been knighted. So many letters of congratulation come to him that he is obliged

to hire a special stenographer to answer them. It happens to be his former wife who had left him because she grew tired of sacrificing her independence to his wealth. When she had been able to earn twelve pounds to buy a typewriter, she was self-supporting and walked out of his house. She warns him in leaving to beware the "twelve pound look" in the new wife's eyes. The suggestion of reform and equality of woman while subject matter for many dramatists as well as story writers is new in Barrie. One is reminded of the Edna Ferber stories that have appeared in The Saturday Evening Post and the American, all suggesting conditions under which women work. There is a little less detail in "The Twelve Pound Look" of course, but the material of the short play comes largely thru suggestion.

In America only a few dramatists have written one-act plays but the American drama itself is young. Still, the little plays that we have are among the best examples of this form of drama.

Richard Harding Davis's "Miss Civilization" compares well with the sort of story that is little more than a character sketch. Miss Gardner, daughter of the president of a railroad, finds that burglars are attempting to break into the house. She hastens to the telephone to call the station and have the agent send the wrecking train with a crew to her aid. Arrangements are made for a signal and then she has-



tens up stairs to her sick mother. The burglars come in, and help themselves to the silver and jewelry. Before leaving, however, one insists upon having something to eat. At this point Miss Gardner enters and manages to entertain the thieves until the whistle sounds and the train crew comes to the rescue. The presence of mind and cleverness is remarkable, even to borrowing forks from the bag to serve the lunch. At the close, a natural touch is well added by her saying: "Mother's not as strong as--as I am" as she faints. The play just misses being sensational. A<sup>1</sup> significant fact is that it was worked over from a story by Harvey Smith. This working over of material from the story into the play is not unique in this instance, however, for Mr. Frank Arnold in an article in *The Nation* for July 31, 1910 says: "The short story has been a dramatic mine for French writers of short plays. They have gone to their own Maupassant and Marcel Prévost and have also borrowed largely from Poe and W. W. Jacobs." He speaks further of the great opportunity of staging Mark Twain and O. Henry.

I have already spoken of Fry's "Little Italy", and Kennedy's "The Terrible Meek". But the man who has done most for the one-act play in America is George Middleton. He has written no less than twelve plays that deal with problems in the life of today. While he may not answer each question

1. The story is not available in U. of K. library.

that he brings up, as in Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger", he at least makes his audience think; in some cases he is convincing. One marvels at the insight into life, the little touches of sympathy with unhappy humanity, and the breadth of understanding, for Middleton is still a young man. The local color is not so marked here, for the problems that he considers do not trouble Americans alone; other countries have been wrestling with them long since.

"Tradition" is an American interpretation of a cause that Ibsen espoused a little more violently,--the desire of woman to be independent. Mary has just returned on a visit to her father's house, which she had left against his will to become an actress. She hasn't succeeded entirely in her work as yet and the father urges her to stay at home "doing a woman's work." He cannot understand his daughter, but when he says: "Something inside. Huh! Have you any clear idea what she's talking about, Emily?" The mother looks softly at Mary and says "I think I understand." The mother has taken to painting paper dolls to earn money to keep her daughter and has been happy in her work. But the keynote of the little play is touched when after the reconciliation Mary says: "No, it was your father speaking and his father and his father. (Looking away wistfully) And perhaps I was speaking for those before me who were silent or couldn't be heard." How many stories we have had on the same subject! <sup>1</sup>"When Mother Be-

*1 Pictorial Review Aug. 1913*

comes Interesting" by Emily Calvin Blake, presents a mother who delights in working, just as Emily had enjoyed painting the dolls, or <sup>1</sup>"Autobiography of a Mother-in-law" by Mary Bain Wright is a story which proves the woman's desire for independence.

"On Bail" is a piece of life itself. It is painfully human. John Lindsay is a gambler and always has been. He has promised his son to quit the profession, but bills have to be met, and when Frank married the parents couldn't expect help from him. Now he's a thousand dollars in debt again and out on bail. What is to be done? Frank can barely pay the debt, and Mrs. Lindsay has only one thousand dollars saved up. It is Lindsay who says "It seems to me now that I think of it--you've made most of the sacrifices. I guess it's my turn now. Sacrifice doesn't seem such a clear thing when one comes to think it over; it's so mixed with other people. But I've figured it out in my head this moment and I see how I can save you both for a while. (Slowly) You can look after her, Frank?" And he leaves to serve out his time in prison. But this is a day of telephones and before the poor, broken old man has reached the district attorney's office, Frank has talked with the Judge. The conversation closed with "Just tell him mother is waiting for him to come back, will you?" How many times has that scene been enacted, I wonder?

*2 Saturday Evening Post. Dec. 8, 1913*

"Their Wife" like "Miss Civilization" is little more than a character sketch, for two husbands--of the same woman--sit before a fire, smoke, and discuss Pauline who has left each in turn. Martin the earlier husband, seems to understand her the better for he loves her yet, while the sting of the desertion is still fresh with Dudley. A few lines explain the play best.

Martin: You'll see it, just as I see we were but moments in Pauline's life--a life rudderless and relentless, caught by each new wind, yet always making wrecks as it bumps its way along to the end.

Dudley (After a Pause): I think she meant to go straight with each.

Martin: That's the pity of it.

Dudley: What will she become?

Martin: Only what she is - - - And you must make it easy for her to go as I did.

Dudley: Let him be fooled as we have been?

Martin: Why not? One must pay to love Pauline. Maybe she'll bring him the same education she's brot us.

Dudley: You mean about trust and a cheat?

Martin: Let's call it that. It's as good as any moral a woman like Pauline can ever leave behind.

The material does sound a little like that of Robt. W. Chambers, and yet Middleton goes further. But he cannot sug-

gest a remedy to this social disorder. It is a condition, alas, that has to be.

In "Waiting" a woman appears directly opposite to Mary in "Tradition." She is a school-teacher in a western town, and is supposedly happy and content in her work. However, she is dissatisfied, because she wants a home with all that it brings. After waiting years for the man she loves to propose and patiently grading copy-books all the while, she adopts a child because she is hungry for affection. Tony supplies the want and calls her "mother." At last the lover comes. He has at last made money and feels that he has the right to propose. In the argument that follows, she explains that she would have been glad to share his poverty but now her love seems silent. It is when he brings forth a drum for Tony, showing his love for the child that she understands and says "you, too." However, it is Tony himself that decides matters. He needs a father as other boys have. "Mother" can't guess whom he'd rather have--but he's so glad he has that drum! I remember a magazine story that appeared some time ago,--I am unable to find it now--that used much the same material. A woman had waited years and years at the gate for a man who had promised to come. Finally, she wrote a poem about her disappointment, and when it was published the man recognized it and returned to meet her at the gate one evening. But she told him it was too late and went in

the house to look in the glass at her gray hairs and tell herself that she did right. And she didn't call him Back!

"The Cheat of Pity" is puzzling. Mrs. Houston has planned to leave her home and go away with Gordon. On the afternoon of the day set, she sends a note saying that she cannot go. As the curtain rises, Gordon enters her parlor to find out about the change of plans. All that she can tell is that her husband has returned after being absent two years. Altho' he had always ill-treated her, there is a look in his eyes that stays her. She can not explain it; he is ill and she feels that she must stay. At the close of the scene, a fall is heard on the floor above. Gordon goes up but returns a different person. The husband is dead--yet he has seen the look in his eyes, too, and he tells her good-bye and leaves forever. The lines that best fit the theme seem to be Gordon's when he says: "You're either too small or too big a woman for a man like me. I can't quite make out which." The observer is just as puzzled, but feels that he could understand better if he were permitted to see the look in the husband's eyes, too. From the name of the play, it must be that which excites pity. The theme is not unlike Shaw's "Candida". The woman gives herself to the one who needs her the more, and in this case, loses both.

The last play in the volume of "Tradition and other



Plays" is "Mothers." Mrs. Parton argues with her son, Phil, because he is weak and apparently worthless, and still wants to marry. Barbara, the girl, comes in to talk to Mrs. Parton and the mother decides to be fair with her. She urges her to wait till Phil proves up--that he has never justified her hope for him and the outlook isn't promising for the future. He expects everything from the world and has never contributed to it by work from hand or brain,--never even failed thru honest effort. She urges Barbara to keep on with her work at the Settlement. "So many women waste their motherhood as I've done, and the world needs it all." But Barbara replies: "I was made to love a man and have children of my own. I knew it when Phil came." She hasn't the kind of motherhood to love the whole world. Like the Lady of the Decoration, she is a specialist." But Mrs. Parton cannot see her probable disappointment in her married life without an effort to avert it. When Barbara argues of the love that speaks, the mother immediately answers: "That's what tricks us and throws us aside alone." This is too much for Barbara's endurance and contrary to Phil's request, she tells her that she is already "his wife--and more!" Mrs. Parton stands tense a moment, then relaxes and accepts the situation as she has accepted everything else, with "All over again! - - There's still something a mother can do."

Frances Bent Dillingham's story "The Force of Example"

in McClures for February 1908 considers this same theme. Tired of making over clothes and pinched in circumstances, a mother is appalled in finding an engagement ring on her eldest daughter's finger. When the girl says "Aren't you going to kiss me, mother, and say you're glad for me?" the mother replies "I can't lie for you, Lizzie - - - of course I hope you'll be happy--and perhaps you will."

Mr. Middleton considers another mother in "Embers". She is trying to save her son from dissipation after the girl he loves has jilted him. In her trouble she turns to a man she herself had loved but disappointed, now a statesman. The friend gives the dramatist's views. He tells the lad his story, and proves that manliness requires one to live up to the standard his ideal woman has set. The mother listens and recognizes the part that she has played in this man's life. The acting counts for much here, for while the boy is being convinced of the truth, his mother sits at the fireplace and coaxes the embers into a steady blaze.

Two characters are required in "The Failures". The Woman and The Man, an artist, have met in Rome years before and discovered a violent love for each other. But her husband, knowing the condition, refused to let her go. If they were to wait a certain time apart, they would forget, he stipulated. The Man waited, and she stayed on past the time to her husband's death. Now she has come, happy and expect-



ant, but he says his love is dead,--she has crushed it because she couldn't brave public opinion to cross the rough places to him. He has waited too long. It is only when she faints, as he is going, that he proves his tenderness for her. Real love can wait,

In "The Gargoyle" life is concentrated. One feels the tension from the very beginning. Arliss, a novelist, and Vaughan, a wanderer come together after some time. The latter has been experiencing the world to its dregs on Arliss's money and now he comes back demanding his lost ideals and self-respect. "My purity, my sense of honor, my dreams. You must give them back to me. I want my faith in things again. I want to be the old Vaughan. I'm empty now--empty. I have nothing left." It suggests the story, "The White Linen Nurse," beginning in the August "Century". The nurse wants her old freedom of expression--the capability to feel. Her "noble expression" hurts. But Vaughan is desperate; he has brought a pistol; he intends to end it all. Arliss sees that things are at a crisis and tells him that he'll gamble with him for the pistol--they'll match miseries. Here the plot lies. Arliss has to show him first that he has something--disgust and pain for the world. He does this by showing him how empty his own life is--absolutely meaningless--because he cannot feel. To crush his pain and disappointment

in love he shot his mind thru it, and it became something he had read or imagined--he was impersonal. Now he was without emotion except in making characters. To save Vaughan from the same fate, he sent him into the world, and he came back with full appreciation of its suffering. Everything lies before him. The dawn is breaking, and Vaughan pushes the pistol across the table, convinced,

One of the strongest of Middleton's little plays is "In His House". It is decidedly suggestive of "The Doll's House" and yet much more modern. Senator Volney Pierce is contemplating a political deal in order to insure his reelection. His wife resents his dishonest policy. They are only waiting for the telephone call to finish it up. He leaves the room. Their common friend comes in, Judith Shannon. Then we learn that the wife has loved another man for seven years, and he has died, broken hearted. Judith also tells that she loves Pierce, but he'll never know it,--she is going abroad. When Pierce comes in, the wife tells him all, and urges him because of her self sacrifice to him not to yield to the dishonest affair. The Senator calls up his political friend and tells him that the deal is off--and that he will not complete his present term of office. He turns to his wife and blames her for all she has done because it was wrong! Then he confesses that his love for her passed away sometime before. Immediately she remembers Jud-

ith and realizing what the future may offer him now, urges him to go to her. He decides to go away this very night. When she says despairingly, "And what's to become of me?" he answers, kindly, "Why you must go to him, of course. Go to the man you love!" The life of senators is treated again in Co<sup>r</sup>a Harris's "Eve's Second Husband", a serial story that ran in the Saturday Evening Post in 1911. The hero has greater strength of character here tho, than Pierce displays in the play. He reforms and tries to repay Eve for her faithful interest.

There is something painfully beautiful about "Madonna".

~~Not~~ It is a wonderful picture, little more, and yet it leaves an impression that one can never forget. A father who is about to die from heart trouble tells his daughter and her fiancée on the eve of their marriage about his wife. Donna, the girl, has never known her mother, for she died when the little girl was born. The description of the mother is beautiful, and when the poor father says: "That was the most sacred moment of my life--I resolved to be worthy!" The person who sits in the audience before this play surely would come to the same resolution. It is uplifting to say the least. One cannot describe a play of this sort. It has to be seen or read personally. The staging has much to do with its impressiveness.

The character who stands out most clearly in "The Man Masterful," Williams, doesn't appear at all. Miss Sherwood has fallen in love with him and learning from him that his wife loves some one else, she has determined to ask Mrs. Williams to release him. But the wife says "no" firmly, and explains her answer in telling her own story. She had loved another man and had told her husband frankly. He refused to let her go,--in fact had asserted his mastery over her by making her dependent upon him in every way, until now her life was a rut,--she had to have him. Moreover, Miss Sherwood isn't the first to whom Mrs. Williams has told the story. There have been others. At this the younger woman gives up. "Still it was masterful" she says,--and the wife leaves smiling enigmatically.

In strength and forcefulness, the one-act play cannot be surpassed in literature; even the short story is second to it. The power of suggestion is infinitely greater than that of description. Some of Henry VanDyke's stories are filled with beauty and significance, but compare them with "The Terrible Meek." The voices that come out of the darkness almost mysteriously awe one, while his attention is held, tense, as Mary grieves and recites the deeds of Christ her son. The captain speaks from a new understanding of things in comforting Mary for he is merely the ordinary human being, common earth until the love of Christ leavens and up-

lifts him and he is worthy. Of course he would refuse to crucify others and be willing to die--for to die now is to live. But the greatest thing surely in the play is the close Dawn gradually breaks and sheep are nibbling at the foot of the cross. How much more effective the picture is than an explanation or description! Words are inadequate. In impressiveness the play goes beyond the opportunity of the story.

True, the story gives greater swing to the author; he can indulge in more freedom of personality while the dramatist is obliged to express himself thru suggestion; certainly, <sup>a method</sup> which requires greater skill. As long as such actresses as Ethel Barrymore and Mrs. Fiske have become interested in the one-act play we need not fear for the interpretation.

The handling of the bit of life in either the play or the story, however, does not vary far. A reference to Miss Gertrude Robin's (Lady Reynold's) "Pot Luck"--a play which I have been unable to find--says that the author "creates a laugh with a tear behind it", and Mr. Esenwein in his excellent book "Writing the Short Story," lays down among other laws of treatment his firm belief that every laugh must tremble to a tear. It is natural enough, too, for happiness is so fickle and unhappiness is so open to change that it is rather precarious to say, at any time, with decision that one stands absolutely apart from the other.

Characters must be flesh and blood in the story as well as in the play if we recognize them. The action is rapid in both. It seems then that the play has gone only one step further than the story, it is more compressed--more suggestive. But the story appeals to the larger audience for there is no stage so far that takes the place of the magazine, altho several small theatres have been built for the production of one-act plays. However, altho' they have succeeded fairly well, the masses of people are excluded, because a theatre that seats three hundred people will enforce high-priced tickets. On the other hand, Mrs. Clement in her Bijou Theatre in Boston has successfully produced one-act plays in a two hour program at ten and twenty cents. So it can be done.

The fear of many people that they will not get their money's worth from the short play puts several meanings into "worth," however, Middleton answers the complaint in much the same way that Sheridan did in "The Critic": "The drama should not be a luxury but a necessary social commodity."

And who shall say that the magazines today are not necessary social commodities? They are filled with stories that reflect actual conditions of modern life. They may be character sketches, or stories that suggest reform, but whatever they are, there is an unmistakeable resemblance to

the short play in almost every particular. Since the story form precedes the play, the influence of the former is undeniable.

Therefore, the relation of the one-act play to the short story is very close, indeed. I have pointed out the similarity in theme, material and character, and have tried to show that the background in both story and play is characteristic of either nationality or locality; the Irish plays are as distinctively Irish as Carlisle's stories, "The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet" is supposedly as typical of the western part of our country as "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."

Method differs little, for both forms are suggestive; the play because it doesn't permit of so much explanation has to be the more pointed, more compressed. The tendency today, however, in every art is toward simplicity in expression with enough implied meaning added to make the public think in filling in details. The old Dutch painter, Hals, worked out every thread in a lace collar, painted every leaf on a tree; the artist today makes a few bold yet skillful strokes with his brush and if one stands at a respectful distance with half-closed eyes, he'll see what the details might have been. In music, too, the majority of people care more for tune today than variation or harmony, the detailed explanation of a musical theme. In the theatre, the observer in the audience is removed from the stage far enough to get the idea of the whole play,



just as one sits well back at an orchestra concert so that the sounds from the various instruments may be even and blended, or just as the lover of pictures stands far enough away to let the actual daub of paint become the tree that it was intended to represent.

However, the actor serves as a very effectual aid in interpreting the playwright's ideas. How much is implied in a smile; how much in a frown! The dramatic element in the play makes it more impressive, as well as more suggestive than the story. The writer tries to leave bits of explanation here and there, a means which compares well with what the actor may do in the play, but lacks the realism of the latter, for things--people--are infinitely clearer when seen than imagined.

The action in both story and play is rapid and approaches a climax at the close. The tone and spirit depend upon the theme in either case. At first thought, the story seems to have the greater opportunity here, since it yields to the personality of the writer. However, any scene from Synge will prove a constant and open challenge to the statement.

The best proof of the close relation of the two forms lies in the fact that certain stories, as in the case of "Miss Civilization," with a little more compression and the necessary change of form become plays.

Consider a well-known story for a moment, to see what changes would be required to turn it to the play form. "Stevenson's "Sire de Maletroit's Door" ought to serve the purpose.

The story begins with a young man, Denis de Boileau, hurrying through a narrow street of Paris from noisy marauders. Much of the tone of the story is developed here in Stevenson's characteristic phrasing and his delight in his odd situation. The youth, in attempting to escape his pursuers, leans against a door of a nearby mansion. The great door gives easily, and Denis, for the moment, is saved. But when his courage revives and he tries to leave, he cannot; he is caught in a trap. What shall he do? There is but one thing to do--follow the panel of light from an adjoining apartment. That apartment is the stage, when Denis enters it, the play begins. All that precedes in the story must be given through the conversation that follows. Therein the play is compressed, for the one-act play does not permit of change of scene. Every action has to occur in this one apartment. However, in this particular story, little difficulty need arise because of that, for, except in one instance, the story itself takes place in that room. Then Sire de Maletroit leaves and Denis goes to him. But he can be called back without serious loss to his dignity, especially since the occasion is one of greatest importance to his pride as he understands the matter. The chapel, according to the story, adjoins the great room, probably at the left rear of the stage. The curtains are drawn to discover Blanche, de Maletroit's niece, kneeling at the altar. That introduces her upon the stage. At the right is a window from which de Maletroit shows Denis the soldiers upon whose pikes he may hurl himself if he tries to escape; also, the iron

ring fixed in the masonry from which he is promised death by hanging if at the end of two hours he does not agree to the marriage.

The tension of the two hours is highly dramatic; the pauses in the conversation, even, full of meaning. The close of the story has beautiful description of the coming dawn. But the play can easily afford to lose that, since the stage today produces real sunshine through its wonderful lighting effects. As the glow grows about the two people on the stage, the clanging of a bell within tells that the time is up, and de Maletroit's selfish chuckle at the doorway lends excellent contrast for a climax.

Not every story may be changed to a play so easily,--for the place is almost fixed and the hurried time element is dramatic. However, the very fact that many can be changed with a little revision, proves the close relation of the two forms. It goes without saying that any play may be rewritten as a story with more elastic possibilities in both place and time, along with the added personality of the author.